

## Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": Georges Fauriol Oral Testimony

November 27, 2001 (read by Zlatko Kovach, Senior Manager, Strategic Planning, International Republican Institute) MR. KOVACH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Honorable members of the Commission. The war on terrorism is as much an endeavor for a triumph of values as it is of military might and diplomacy. The theme of religion is a more difficult, less certain and more complex issue, but it is at the heart of the ongoing battle of values. The theme of religion addresses terrorism's root causes, not solely its symptoms. It also underscores the often misunderstood reality that questions of power should not be confused with questions of faith, despite the terrorists' attempts to enter into a theological and practical hold. A defining characteristic of freedom of religion is that it entails individual and personal belief. It is a fundamental right. It is not a right imposed by the state, whether secular or one defined by religion. When such a freedom is taken collectively in the form of religious communities, it can be subject of suppression in society's weakest or weaker segment. When religious freedom is suppressed, it in turn becomes more difficult to renew. It is a mistake that suppose that a generic attention to human rights concerns necessarily improves freedom of religion. This sequencing of interests from human rights to religious freedom may not protect or enhance expression of religious freedom. Indeed there can be and often is increased persecution. One example may be the persecution of Christian Copts in Egypt. That has at times required elements of an attack on the very existence of that community in Egypt. The United States now needs to redefine priorities. There is a need for new tools in combination with tested tools to deal with the growing religious authoritarianism or even religious fascism. This is particularly true in portions of the Islamic world, although the rest of the world is not immune from such a challenge as the conflicts in Africa and other parts of the world attest. The starting point for U.S. strategy should be an intellectual basis that excludes cultural relativism. The fact of the matter is that not all ideas are the same. Another element of strategy is that it must have a long-term proactive outlook. Effective strategy implies going beyond dramatic descriptions of religious persecution, though our distinctions bring into focus two relevant tools: religious reconciliation and institutional engagement. Religious reconciliation is a desirable tool, but in practice is not applicable in a large scale. Historical experience suggests identifiable criteria. Usually one side must capitulate and/or the objectives of the conflict become very unpopular before reconciliation acquires a practical and negotiable appeal. Another criterion may be reconciliation imposed from the outside. This implies the establishment of a stringent implementation framework that cannot be changed by circumstances. A second rather successful expression of this form of reconciliation may be the evolving post-Second World War Franco/German relationship. First part, institutional engagement, in the context of this hearing stems from the fundamental democratic principle that government should not and does not have inherent preference in one faith over another. The principal interest is in the mechanism that allows the multiplicity of value sets to grow and coexist. A democratic system thus protects multiple sets of faith as well as the nonfaithful. Taliban's authoritarian approach, on the other hand, twists the notion of value-based let alone faith-based governance. For example, outside of the Taliban's faith-based government there is no viable governance, no freedom of expression. And by their notion of limits on expression is a authoritarian zeal to restrict alternative and individual expressions of faith. The product of such a restrictive environment devoid of freedom necessarily is conflict. Effective institutional engagement needs to bring about a change in political culture via political parties as both effective institutions of engagements. This implies more than what can be described as a nominal change in civil society. Civil society by itself is not sufficient for a true democratic environment. Freedom of religion does provide the basis for freedom of assembly, that in turn leads to the expression of other freedoms, including the freedom of political organization and specifically political party building. International Republican Institution's experience is anchored by the simple idea that political parties are a very effective vehicle for changing societal needs. Effective parties need to have an internal democratic structure and externally abide by similar rules. IRI is engaged and is actively working with Islamist parties such as in Turkey. IRI has provided training, organization, political communication, party platform help, leadership training, and other activities to these and other Turkish parties. One of IRI's post-September 11th challenges is to engage an expanded community of Islamist parties in less secular Islamic societies than Turkey. Yet another challenges of engagement is the possibility for political party-building in countries such as Afghanistan itself. IRI's work in Cambodia, for example, helped produce viable political parties out of warring factions that now promote fundamental rights and helped develop a vibrant civil society. Cambodia shows that a society can regenerate far quicker than many had expected. In a post-conflict environment at least three sources of resistance may be expected: from the ruling government; from the circle of clerics, who are often self selected as religious leaders; and from competing economic sectors that may be threatened by greater competition and eventually greater transparency brought by political parties. IRI's experience with political party engagement suggests a set of criteria helpful to U.S. policy makers also looking for applications for the promotion of religious freedom. First, a strategic political party dialog with diverse segments of the political community has significant payoffs. Second, there is a need for a long-term understanding of the societal interests, and political parties are likely to sustain. In some special circumstances political party engagement ensures a residual interest in or protection of issues or constituencies in countries viewed by Washington as constituting troubling relationships. Changing public opinion through democratic political party is a fourth element, and this development positively impacts fundamental rights and thus the stability, legitimacy and integrity of the democratic system among other key issues. And fifth, distinct engagement may ensure increased credibility in a future brokering role as a goodwill gesture. An even more direct application of some of IRI's political party engagement brings out functional, or operational, or programmatic subsets, but most notably governance, youth education and women in politics or women in governance. These have a direct bearing on the war on terrorism and overlap with concerns for religious

freedom. CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Mr. Kovach, you have one minute left. MR. KOVACH: Sustained engagement in democratic governance is the antidote to terrorist grievances and authoritarian tendencies. The quality and effectiveness of governance is at issue when tensions develop in the balance between the governed and the governments. In Islamic or quasi-secular Muslim countries, the state acts by partially interpreting its traditional understanding of the law through Islamic law. Some of these countries are tactical and even strategic allies of Washington. However, in Islamic authoritarian theocracies, religious authoritarianism reigns and the state plays a more secondary role to religion. The fact of the matter is that neither case is truly democratic. Democratic beachheads in the war on terrorism will be secured if the issue of religious freedom is centered in policy terms. Islamic societies can be most comprehensively engaged by assisting political party as well as civil society development. The challenge is to link political and religious freedom through development of political parties that most optimally channel religious communities and minorities needs. True religious freedom in the Islamic world will be achieved when Christian and other minority communities are able to participate fully in the political system. While the development of political parties and civil society requires a delicate balance and cannot end all religious persecution, it nevertheless provides a foundation in protecting freedom of religion. IRI has considerable experience in political party development and civil society development, and looks forward to using institutional engagement to promote freedom in Islamic societies.